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2 Clash in Debate Over Reagan Secrecy Rule

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 15—A Reagan Administration official and a prominent First Amendment lawyer clashed here Thursday about whether the Administration's secrecy program was a reasonable safeguard for national security or a radical assault on free speech.

"The differences between the policies of this Administration and its predecessors of both parties are fundamental, not peripheral," Floyd Abrams, a New York lawyer who has represented news organizations in battles against the Government, asserted

in the debate.

"Indeed," he added "the Administration's fixation, as I view it, on national security at the expense of freedom of expression is such that it seems virtually always to require the latter claims to be overcome, even when those claims are at their greatest and when the needs of national security are at their least compelling."

But Richard K. Willard, the Justice Department official who has been the chief architect of the Administration's program to protect national security secrets, denied "that this Administration has done anything radically differ-

ent from previous administrations or unique in American history."

Protection in 'Dangerous World'

Mr. Willard said the Administration's secrecy measures, including lifelong censorship agreements for officials who handle especially sensitive intelligence data, were legal and necessary to protect national security secrets in "a dangerous world."

The 90-minute debate was sponsored by the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Law and National Security. Almost 100 lawyers, officials and others attended.